

Message Text

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14

ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-11 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 DHA-02 OMB-01 ACDA-05 SY-05 SCS-03

SCA-01 OPR-02 AID-05 SAM-01 OC-05 CCO-00 /116 W

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P R 081110Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4918

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

AMEMBASSY MADGOD

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USMISSION NATO

USMISSION USUN NY

SUCINCEUR

CINCUSNAVEUR

FOSIF ROTXR

COMSIXTHFLT

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 0028

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PBOR MMOL MOPS MR MO SS SP

SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: MILITARY SITUATION IN MAURITANIA AND
SOUTHERN SAHARA

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 0016

1. MAURITANIAN SECURITY AND ARMY UNITS ARE CONTINUING THEIR
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SEARCH FOR OUTSIDE MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO SUSTAIN AND REINFORCE

THEIR MOVEMENT NORTHWARD INTO SAHARA. ON 5 JAN. A GABONESE MILITARY C-130 AIRCRAFT, COMPLETE WITH GABONESE NATIONAL CREW, LANDED AT NOUAKCHOTT AIRPORT. AIRCRAFT HAS APPARENTLY BEEN PLACED AT MAURITANIAN DISPOSAL BY PRESIDENT BONGO. FOLLOWING DAY, GABONESE C-130 TRANSPORTED 125 COMBAT-READY MAURITANIAN TROOPS TO NOUADHIBOU.

2. SPANISH CHARGE PORTS THAT ON 5 JAN. FRENCH SHIP ARRIVED IN NOUADHIBOU WITH MILITARY SUPPLIES FOR MAURITANIAN ARMY. SHIPMENT WAS SAID TO CONSIST PRIMARILY OF SMALL ARMS AND MUNITIONS, BUT ALSO INCLUDED AN UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF 90 MILLIMETER CANNONS. SPANISH CHARGE REPORTED IN CONFIDENCE THAT FRENCH MILITARY ATTACHE HAD QUIETLY TRAVELED TO NOUADHIBOU TO OVERSEE OFFLOADING OF FRENCH ARMS SHIPMENT. WHILE IN NOUADHIBOU, FRENCH MILITARY ATTACHE REQUESTED AND RECEIVED PERMISSION TO VISIT SOUTHERN SAHARAN CITY OF LA GUERA WHICH WAS TAKEN BY MAURITANIANS ON 19 DEC.

3. ACCORDING TO SPANISH, THE MAURITANIAN FORCE PROCEEDING NORTHWARD TOWARD AUSERT (2235N, 1415W) HAS STALLED. ALTHOUGH THE MAURITANIAN COLUMN HAS ENCOUNTERED LITTLE IF ANY RESISTANCE, THE HILLY TERRAIN SURROUNDING AUSERT AND THE KNOWN PRESENCE OF POLISARIO ELEMENTS HAS DETERRED ANY FURTHER NORTHWARD MOVEMENT OF THESE FORCES FOR PAST THREE DAYS.

4. INDICATIVE OF CONTINUING SERIES OF SKIRMISHES BETWEEN MAURITANIANS AND POLISARIO ON MAURITANIAN, NOT SAHARAN, SOIL IS REPORT OF POLISARIO ATTACK 6 JAN. ON A SMALL MAURITANIAN VILLAGE 70 KILOMETERS NORTH OF FDERIK (2241N, 1243 W AND IN GENERAL AREA OF IRON MINES). ACCORDING TO REPORT SPANISH EMBASSY RECEIVED FROM ITS CONSULATE IN NOUADHIBOU, POLISARIO TROOPS ATTACKED MAURITANIANS WITH MORTARS. AFTER AN HOUR-LONG EXCHANGE OF FIRE, POLISARIO UNITS SIMPLY WITHDREW WITHOUT ATTEMPTING TO BRING THE FIGHTING TO ANY SORT OF CONCLUSION. CASUALTIES FOR THIS SKIRMISH LISTED AS FIVE MAURITANIAN (2 MILITARY, 3 CIVILIAN) AND TWO POLISARIO DEAD. SPANISH EMBASSY OFFICER INTERPRETED THIS ACTIVITY AS ATTEMPT BY

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POLISARIO TO HARASS MAURITANIAN FORCES WITHOUT ESCALATING FIGHTING TO WIN OR LOSE SITUATION.

5. COMMENT: WITH MAURITANIAN GROUND FORCES BOGGED DOWN SOUTH OF AUSERT, IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT THE ONLY WAY MAURITANIANS WILL BE ABLE TO OCCUPY VILLA CISNEROS PRIOR TO SPANISH WITHDRAWAL IS BY TRANSPORTING TROOPS BY AIR AND/OR SEA. NOW THAT MAURITANIANS APPARENTLY

HAVE GABONESE C-130 AT THEIR DISPOSAL, AIRLIFT OF SUFFICIENT TROOPS TO TAKE OVER CISNEROS WOULD NOT SEEM TO BE A DIFFICULT MISSION TO ACCOMPLISH LOGISTICALLY.HANDYSIDE

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